

# The "Golden Flower of Prosperity"



General store merchandise

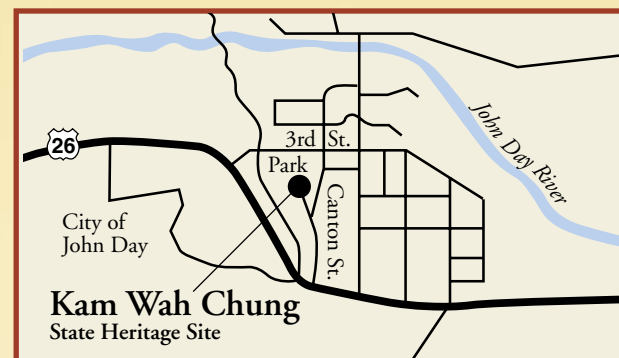


Shrine for religious rituals

Once it was a general store, a doctor's office, a post office, a library and a center of Chinese social and religious life. Now it is a museum—one of the most unusual you will find anywhere.



Kam Wah Chung State Heritage Site is cooperatively preserved and operated by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, the Friends of Kam Wah Chung & Co. Museum and the City of John Day. It is open from May 1 to October 31, seven days a week. Hours are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Admission is free. Tours start at the top of the hour at the Interpretive Center (last tour at 4:00 p.m.).



To contact the Kam Wah Chung interpretive center, call 1-541-575-2800

Toll free information number: 1-800-551-6949  
oregonstateparks.org

This publication is available in alternative formats on request.  
Write to: OPRD, 725 Summer St. NE, Ste C,  
Salem, OR 97301, or call 503-986-0707  
(for the hearing impaired 1-800-735-2900).



**Kam Wah Chung**  
State Heritage Site



John Day





*Kam Wah Chung in 1909*

## A Multi-purpose Place

Old, tiny and unglamorous to the casual observer, the building that once housed Kam Wah Chung (which loosely translates as “Golden Flower of Prosperity”) & Co. is a one-of-a-kind property, a National Historic Landmark and listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The walls of the bottom story, built around 1870, are made out of locally quarried volcanic tuff. The rest of the structure consists of pine wood planking. The upper level portion with exterior access was added in the 1890s. The building underwent major rehabilitation in the mid-1970s when it became a state park property.

The building’s earliest customers were primarily Chinese residents of Canyon City and the John Day area who were attracted by work generated by eastern Oregon’s gold strikes of the period. Some chronicles suggest it served travelers as a trading post.

Its “golden flower” era began when young immigrants Ing “Doc” Hay and Lung On bought the building’s lease in 1888. Then it became a successful place of business, a frequently visited herbal medical office, a haven from social persecution for Chinese residents and even a temple, or “joss house.”

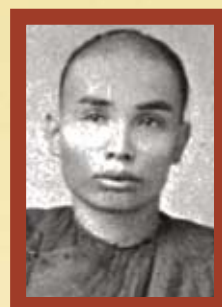
To Doc Hay and Lung On, the building was also home—a home they shared with relatives, friends and itinerants into the 1940s. Its seven rooms included two bedrooms, a bunkroom and a kitchen as well as its general store, stockroom, herb room and medical office.

In today’s John Day, the building is a memorial as well as a museum commemorating an important era in Oregon history and recalling the lives of two men who eventually earned their community’s respect as two of its most prominent citizens.

## Its Multi-talented Proprietors

Lung On and Doc Hay were among a large wave of Chinese immigrants who helped build the American West in the late 19th century. Deciding that a partnership could be mutually beneficial, they formed one that lasted for more than 50 years.

Doc Hay established an herbal medicine practice that became known throughout eastern and central Oregon. A master in pulse diagnosis, the “China Doctor of John Day,” as he became known, treated both Chinese and Euro-American patients in his Kam Wah Chung “clinic” until 1948.



*Doc Hay*

Doc Hay also performed religious rituals. The shrine he used is one of the museum’s most exquisite exhibits.



*Lung On*

Well educated and fluent in the English language, Lung On was a skilled merchant. He sold supplies to local miners, of both European and Asian descent, before expanding the enterprise into a successful dry goods store and import business. He also became respected as a labor contractor and immigration assistant for the regional Chinese community.



*The apothecary*

Thousands of objects displayed within the building’s 1,250 square feet of exhibit space yield insight into a significant cultural legacy. Old tin containers and wooden boxes filled with Chinese teas, foodstuffs, tobacco and medicinal products line shelves as if still on display in a general store. Although many items were imported from China to serve the local Chinese community, you will find a good array of American products, many still unopened.

Hand-made Chinese antiques are scattered among the museum’s furnishings, many in the kitchen and bedrooms. Doc Hay’s former bedroom is the one with the cleaver on the bed stand.

You can easily imagine the venerable doctor mixing remedies in the apothecary, which was protected by iron window bars. His medical supplies, which he imported from China, included at least 500 different herbs. Many are rare with unknown uses. They ranged from common clove, ginger and red pepper products to such items as wild asparagus, chicken gizzards, tortoise shell, pomegranate bark and cocklebur.



*Doc Hay's bedroom*

## Treasures Left Behind



*Kitchen area, including antique wok*

## An Interpretive Center Full of Stories . . . and More Treasures

The story of Kam Wah Chung & Co. and the culture that grew around it is well preserved by a wealth of personal letters, financial records and other documents written in Cantonese. Some of the correspondence describes period lifestyles and living conditions, in both China and North America. It also includes letters written by residents of 19th century China requesting money for passage to the “New World.”

Examples of these records and writings are showcased along with artifacts displayed and interpreted in the museum and nearby interpretive center. Oregon Parks and Recreation Department park hosts and members of the Friends of Kam Wah Chung & Co. Museum volunteer group serve as helpful greeters and interpreters of one of the best surviving intact collections of cultural remnants from the American West’s late 19th century influx of Chinese immigrants.